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**POLISHING THE SILVER COVENANT CHAIN: A Brief History of Some of the Symbols and Metaphors in Haudenosaunee Treaty Negotiations**

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Part 2

say we break the covenant chain ...It is hard to alleadge that the covenant chain should be broak for such a matter as this, should all that long chain of friendship and correspondence which we have had together for soe many yeares, ever since Christians came first into these parts, be broke upon so small a business as going to Canada for our friends detained by the French contrary to the articles of peace [the 1697 Treaty of Ryswick].

**1710, April 19.** Possible symbolic use of the Covenant Chain by four Haudenosaunee ambassadors in London. **Did these four Haudenosaunee ambassadors to Queen Anne in London refer to the Covenant Chain?** Records from 1710 raise an intriguing possibility that an English translation did not accurately reflect the Haudenosaunee intention to convey the idea of the Covenant Chain. The records are those related to the 1710 visit by four Haudenosaunee diplomats to London to meet with Queen Anne during one of England's wars with France (Queen Anne's War, 1702-1713). These records include the English words "allies," "alliance," and "friendship" which clearly convey the same meaning as the Covenant Chain. The records also include two metaphors common to Haudenosaunee diplomacy: "hung up the Kettle" – meaning to befriend -- and "took up the Hatchet" – meaning to go to war. Several belts of wampum are also noted in the records. With all this evidence of metaphors and symbols such as wampum belts, it seems probable that the four Haudenosaunee diplomats referred to the Covenant Chain.

The 1710 visit by four Haudenosaunee leaders to Queen Anne is perhaps the most famous diplomatic visit by any Indian nation to any capital of Europe, the United States, or Canada. The delegation was made up of four Mohawk Haudenosaunee (including at least one who was actually an adopted Mahican) visited the court of England's Queen Anne. Called by their hosts the "Four Kings," they were in fact simply the ambassadors of their people. They brought with them "belts of wampum" – of unknown number -- and gave them to a monarch whom they considered to be an ally, a friend, and -- most importantly -- their equal. Their leader was Te Ye Neen Ho Ga Prow of the Wolf Clan. Known primarily by his English name Hendrick, he would later befriend William Johnson on the frontier of colonial New York and, as an old man (about seventy years old), die in 1755 during a furious battle with the French at Lake George. Equally impressive among the delegates was Saga Yean Qua Prab Ton, known as Brant. Brant was beautifully tattooed upon his face and chest. His grandson, Joseph Brant, Thayendanegea, would visit London in 1775 and later fight during the American Revolution as an ally of the British.

Hendrick and Brant, together with Oh Nee Yeath Ton No Prow (John) and Elow Ob Koam (the Mahican, known as Nicholas), presented the wampum to Queen Anne at St. James Palace on April 19, 1710, and spoke to her through a translator:

*GREAT QUEEN!*

We have undertaken a long and tedious Voyage, which none of our Predecessors [among the Haudenosaunee] could ever be prevail'd upon to undertake. The Motive that induc'd us was, that we might see our *GREAT QUEEN*, and relate to Her those things we thought absolutely necessary for the Good of *HER*, and us her Allies, on the other side of the Great Water.

We doubt not but our *GREAT QUEEN*, has been acquainted with our long and tedious War, in Conjunction with her

we doubt not but our *GREAT QUEEN*, has been acquainted with our long and tedious war, in conjunction with her Children (meaning Subjects) against Her Enemies the French; and that we have been as a strong Wall for their Security, even to the loss of our best Men....

And in token of our Friendship, we hung up the Kettle, and took up the Hatchet... As a Token of the Sincerity of the Six Nations, We do here, in the Name of All, present Our *Great Queen* with these *BELTS* of *WAMPUM*...

...we have been in Alliance with our *Great Queen's* Children [that is, the English colonists]

1710, June 8. Council at Onondaga. Example of how former enemies could be brought into the Covenant Chain. Address of a delegation of Ottawas to the Haudenosaunee and Abraham Schuyler and Everet Banker, representatives of the Governor of New York and the Crown, at Onondaga, after some Ottawas and the Haudenosaunee had made peace the previous summer:

You have taken us into your Covenant Chain [that is, between the Haudenosaunee and the English, represented by the New York governor] wch you say shall be kept inviolable that no Ax can cut it to pieces. We promise on our sides to keep the Covenant forever. In Testimony whereof they give a Bever Coat.

**1710, June 21.** Council at Albany. Address of the Seneca spokesman to the English representatives, Abraham Schuyler and Everet Banker, as recorded in the official records of the colony of New York:  
21 June a Senneca Sachem arrives at Albany with the Wagenhaes Indians [Ottawas] & makes a Speech to the Commissioners acquainting them that the Sennecas do renew the Covenant with our Govt & they desire we will put the Covenant Chain in a Box that it may be kept clean & continue to them and their Children after them forever.

**1710, July 2.** Council at Schenectady between the New York colonial Indian Commissioners and the Mohawks. **This is evidence that the colonial governor of New York speaks for the Crown and all the Crown's colonies.** On behalf of Governor Robert Hunter, the commissioners told the Mohawks:  
The Govr renews the Covenant Chain of Friendship & Alliance with them in [on] behalf not only of this Province but of all her Majesties Dominions in North America.

**1712, July 7.** Council at Onondaga between Peter Schuyler and all five nations. This demonstrates how trade and economics were at the foundation of the Covenant Chain. A speech delivered by the "Sachems" of the Grand Council to Peter Schuyler included the following, as recorded by Schuyler:

That it is well known the original Foundation of their Alliance with the Christians were the Advantages they received by Trading with them....

We have made various Attempts to get Goods sold us Cheaper, and we have often told you that unless they were, we should become a defenceless People, fall a Prey to our Enemies & our Union be dissolved.

We now tell you this Affair may be the occasion of breaking that Chain of Peace & Friendship wch hath subsisted between us & you As the Links hav lately seemed to be wearing way & you [that is, Peter Schuyler] are now

come to strengthen them & preserve the Chain from being broke wch we approve of & rejoice in, We hope as we have now told you the true & only Method to preserve this Chain inviolable between us namely to let us have goods Cheaper, that this Method will take Place by wch the Chain will be kept firm & we shall live in Peace forever....

Brother Corlaer [a message to the governor] ...

We are thankful to you for renewing the Covt Chain by the means of Quieder or Col [Peter] Schuyler & we promise to keep it inviolable on our parts & in token thereof we give a Belt of Wampum.

**1722, August and September. Treaty at Albany.** On September 14, a Haudenosaunee speaker, whose name is not recorded, rose in council and addressed "Brother Corlaer" – Governor William Burnet, who represented the Crown – and the other white diplomats including the governor of Pennsylvania, Sir William Keith. In this speech, note the imagery of how the chain would "jingle" throughout "the 5 Nations" if there was any danger to the Chain:  
Brother Corlaer

When the Christians first came to this Country our Ancestors fastened the ship that brought them behind a Great Mountain with a Chain in order to secure the same which mountain lyes behind the Sinnekees Country, so that the one end of the Chain, being fastened there and the other end at ye Ship, if any body would steal away & molest this ship the chain will jingle & make a noise & so alarm all the 5 Nations who are bound to defend this ship & this is the foundation & original of the Covenant Chain among the 5 Nations, which our ancestors made, which was to preserve this ship from any harm gave a Belt of Wampum

**1730, September 21.** Council in Albany between the New York Indian Commissioners and a delegation of three Mohawk chiefs. The Mohawks' speech addresses how the Covenant Chain was being undermined by the white colonists' greed for Haudenosaunee land, a greed that never ceased. The records show that "hull" – meaning hull of corn – was the original English translation of the word the Mohawks used to describe their remaining lands in the Mohawk River Valley, but that the interpreter decided to use "small" instead. Peter Wraxall was the collector of these records and the secretary of the Commissioners of Indian Affairs. In 1754, Wraxall noted that the word "enticements" included "making them drunk." . The Mohawk delegation's speech to the Commissioners includes the following:

As we live under a Strong Covenant Chain being One Heart one Body & One head, we must acquaint you that the most part of our Lands upon the Mohawk River is sold to the Christians & our Hearts grieve us when we consider what small [Hull] p[ar]cell of Lands is remaining to us & finding by the Inticements of Christians that our Young Men give Ear to dispose yet of that small remainder, then we will be utterly destroyed & scattered among the French & others, & by means whereof the Covt Chain will be broken. We therefore humbling entreat his Excellency & this Board [of Indian Commissioners] that for the future all Christians may be strictly forbid to entice any of our Indians to purchase any of our Lands & that his Excellcy will be please to prevent all manner of Persons to produce any more of our Lands that remain unsold in order that we & our Children & Posterity may live there Qui't [quiet] & peacable as Brethren as we have done hitherto & keep the Covt Chain firm, whereupon we lay down 5 Bever Skins.

1744, June 26: Canasatego presents what is now the most famous recitation of the history of Covenant Chain. Canasatego (Onondaga) to representatives of Pennsylvania, Maryland, and Virginia at Lancaster, Pennsylvania. Canasatego, an Onondaga spokesman, gave two famous speeches at Lancaster, Pennsylvania. Canasatego's words were translated by the white interpreter Conrad Weiser. Canasatego was born in the 1680s. Thus he was about sixty years old -- tall, strong, vigorous, and broad chested -- when he gave his Lancaster speech. The speech was printed by Benjamin Franklin as a part of the record of the negotiations.

The following are excerpts from Canasetego's speech:

*Brother, the Governor of Maryland,*

WHEN you mentioned the Affair of the Land Yesterday, you went back to old Times, and told us, you had been in Possession of the Province of *Maryland* above One Hundred Years; but what is One Hundred Years in Comparison of the Length of Time since our Claim began? since we came out of this Ground? For we must tell you, that long before One Hundred Years our Ancestors came out of this very Ground, and their Children have remained here ever since. You came out of the Ground in a Country that lies beyond the Seas, there you may have a just Claim, but here you must allow us to be your elder Brethren, and the Lands to belong to us long before you knew any thing of them. It is true, that above One Hundred Years ago the Dutch came here in a Ship, and brought with them several Goods; and we were so well pleased with them, that we tied their Ship to the Bushes on the Shore; and afterwards, liking them still better the longer they staid with us, and thinking the Bushes too slender, we removed the Rope, and tied it to the Trees; and as the Trees were liable to be blown down by high Winds, or to decay of themselves, we, from the Affection we bore them, again removed the Rope, and tied it to a strong and big Rock [*here the Interpreter said, They mean the Oneido Country*] and not content with this, for its further Security we removed the Rope to the big Mountain [*here the Interpreter says they mean the Onondago Country*] and there we tied it very fast, and rowll'd Wampum about it; and, to make it still more secure, we stood upon the Wampum, and sat down upon it, to defend it, and to prevent any Hurt coming to it, and did our best Endeavours that it might remain uninjured for ever. During all this Time the New-comers, the *Dutch*, acknowledged our Right to the Lands, and solicited us, from Time to Time, to grant them Parts of our Country, and to enter into League and Covenant with us, and to become one People with us.

AFTER this the *English* came into the Country, and, as we were told, became one People with the *Dutch*. About two Years after the Arrival of the *English*, an *English* Governor came to *Albany*, and finding what great Friendship subsisted between us and the *Dutch*, he approved it mightily, and desired to make as strong a League, and to be upon as good Terms with us as the *Dutch* were, with whom he was united, and to become one People with us: And ... he found that the Rope which tied the Ship to the great Mountain was only fastened with Wampum, which was liable to break and rot, and to perish in a Course of Years; he therefore told us, he would give us a Silver Chain, which would be much stronger, and would last for ever. This we accepted, and fastened the Ship with it, and it has lasted ever since."

**July 4, 1744.** Because the following remarks by Canasatego at Lancaster are noted again during the American Revolution by Patriot negotiators at Albany, New York in 1775 (see below, August 25, 1775), the words spoken by Canasatego on July 4, 1744 are given here:

We heartily recommend Union and a good Agreement between you our Brethren. Never disagree, but preserve a strict Friendship for one another, and thereby you, as well as we, will become stronger.

OUR wise Forefathers established Union and Amity between the *Five Nations*; this has made us formidable; this has given us great Weight and Authority with our neighboring Nations.

WE are a powerful Confederacy; and, by your observing the same Methods our wise Forefathers have taken, you will acquire fresh Strength and Power; therefore whatever befalls you, never fall out one with another.

**1753, September 15.** Letter from the Lords of Trade at Whitehall Palace in London to the governor of New York, Sir Danvers Osborn. When this letter was written, a war with the French was increasingly probable, especially because of conflicting French and English interests over the lands around what became Pittsburgh (at the convergence of the Allegheny River and the Monongahela River to form the Ohio River). The alliance between the English and the Haudenosaunee was imperative, especially because the lands at the convergence of the Allegheny River and the Monongahela River to form the Ohio River were directly under Haudenosaunee control. There was also an issue around a controversial land sale in Mohawk country: the vast Kayaderosseras patent around Saratoga and the lands claimed by George Klock and others south the Mohawk River near Canajoharie [neither of these issues was ever resolved, and the Klock family became notorious Patriots during the American Revolution]. This letter is one of the reasons the northern colonies convened of the Albany Congress and created the Albany Plan of Union. The London officials in charge of the colonies, the Lords of Trade, with the full support of the Crown, forced representatives of the northern colonies to meet at Albany to plan a coordinated effort to placate the Haudenosaunee, who were angry over land fraudulent land dealings, and specifically renew the Covenant Chain. The letter stresses the instructions of the Lords of Trade to the governor of New York, Sir Danvers Osborn, and the other colonial governors. These directives included

burying the Hatchet and renewing the Covenant Chain....

[notifying] the other neighbouring Governnts in alliance with them to send Commissrs to be joined with those of New York ... Virginia, Pennsylvania, Maryland, N. Hampshire, Massachusetts Bay and New Jersey ... comprised in one general treaty to be made in His Majty's name.

**1754, June 29.** Speech, approved by all the representatives on June 27, 1754, on behalf of the representatives of New York, Virginia, Pennsylvania, Maryland, New Hampshire, Massachusetts Bay and New Jersey New Hampshire, Massachusetts to the Haudenosaunee, delivered by Lieutenant Governor James de Lancey [Governor Sir Danvers Osborn had died, and de Lancey took his place]. This speech includes a detailed description of a Covenant Chain wampum belt. Note also that de Lancey makes the point of speaking in the name of the King ("in his name"), and that de Lancey is also speaking for the other colonies.

I have invited you here by the command of the great King our Common Father to receive a present from him, and in his name to renew the ancient Treaty between this and all his other Governnts, and you our Brethren; and I have the pleasure to tell you, that by His Majty's order there are now present, Commissrs from Massachusetts Bay, New Hampshire, Connecticut, Rhode Island, Pennsylvania and Maryland.

Virginia and Carolina likewise desire to be considered as present, altho' some great affairs which those Governnts are engaged in, have prevented their sending Commissrs; we are glad to see our Brethren here in health, and heartily bid you welcome. A Belt...

Brethren, We come to strengthen and brighten the chain of friendship.... This chain hath remained firm and unbroken from the beginning. This Belt will represent to you our disposition to preserve it strong and bright so long as the sun and moon shall endure and in the name of the Great King our Father, and in the behalf of all His Majty's Colonies, we now solemnly renew brighten and strengthen the ancient covenant Chain, and promise to keep the same inviolable and free from rust, and we expect the like confirmation and assurance on your part. – A Chain Belt.

His Honour the Lieutt Govr, explained this Chain Belt to them in the following manner:

Brethren. This represents the King our common Father – this line represents his arms extended, embracing all us the English and all the Six Nations – These represents the Colonies which are here present and those who desire to be thought present – These represents the Six Nations, and there is a space left to draw in the other Indians – And there in the middle is the line represented which draws us all in under the King our common Father.

**1763, May.** Example of how the Covenant Chain could be evoked as a warning to the English by the Haudenosaunee not to act unethically and therefore break the Covenant Chain. Teyyawarunte (Onondaga) to Sir William Johnson.

*Background:* In the aftermath of victory over the French, Sir Jeffrey Amherst had been inept in formulating a trade policy with the French-allied Indians. He had imposed restrictions on Indian trade, and had encouraged the charging of higher prices and had nearly eliminated the giving of trade goods as presents (the eighteenth century equivalent of foreign aid). The Onondaga spokesman, Teyyawarunte, after offering a series of opening gestures and gifts of wampum, chastised Johnson as the English representative of Amherst's policy. When Teyyawarunte mentions the first agreement with the English, he is probably referring to the iron Covenant Chain of 1664. The first mention of the Silver Covenant Chain is 1677. (The first agreement with the Dutch was 1613.) Note, too, that Johnson, his staff, and his trusted friend and interpreter John Butler did not feel that it was necessary to record the entire recitation of the original historical context of Covenant Chain -- merely noting that Teyyawarunte had recited "the whole of it." This is an indication of how much a part of normal diplomacy such a recitation had become. That Johnson did not comment on how it was presented also indicates that it did not include any new concept, but was in fact a continuation of the seventeenth century history discussed earlier in this report.

Brother

We are Sorry that we are under a Necessity of Reminding our Brethren ye. English of the first Agreement [the 1664 iron Covenant Chain?] made on ye. first Arrival of their People in this our Country, which Agreement was then thought by them verry agreeable & advantagious, and great care was promised then by both, to be taken of it, -- [&] that nothing should be able to break, or overset it. --

Here repeated the whole of it [the history of the Covenant Chain], and concluded with renewing & Strengthening, the same on their parts. --

A White Belt w[i]th. ye. No. of Nat[ion]s.

11 Rows [of wampum, meaning a belt made with a width of 11 rows of wampum beads; the length is not recorded]

Johnson and the interpreter John Butler did include, in the next passages, what the Onondaga Teyyawarunte had to say about which specific problems the Haudenosaunee wished to emphasize as prohibited by the silver Covenant Chain. First, he addressed Johnson asking Johnson's assistance in removing "rust."

we now entreat you to Join us in our Request to ye. Genrl. and Govr. wh. is, that they Assist in keeping bright, and Strong ye. Covt. Chain, which is to say [that] of late [the Covenant Chain] seems to contract a great deal of rust

Then Teyyawarunte gave an address he wished Johnson to transmit to Sir Jeffrey Amherst, and a second address he wished Johnson to convey to the Governor of New York. The speech to be transmitted by Johnson to Amherst is especially important. The Onondaga spokesman noted in his address to Amherst that unless Amherst acted properly to adhere to the Covenant Chain,

ye. Great Spirit above may Send Punishment on you for a Breach of the kind [in another copy, "on those who break it"]. By this Belt, we ye. Six Nations earnestly desire You will consider well before Yu attempt [to] break ye. Chain.

In addition to being a powerful evocation, this demonstrates how the Haudenosaunee held agreements to be binding under the authority of a Supreme Being, and not simply bonds of a political or economic nature. This belief continues today.

Having evoked a spiritual reason for continuing the Covenant Chain, the Onondaga Teyyawarunte informed Johnson what he expected Johnson to transmit the Governor of New York regarding the practical, very real reason to reassert the Covenant Chain:

suffer not yourself to be led away by any evil thoughts, or any thing else, wh[ich] may occasion a Breach [between Us] thereof, as Seems now to be threatened, but to consider seriously the ill consequences of a War, which must effect You, & your People, as well as us -- Peace is best for both [of us], as yt. [that] will never destroy either of Us.

**1763, September.** Council at Johnson Hall in the Mohawk Valley. *Background:* This council was held during the frontier war in the Great Lakes known as Pontiac's War (1763-1766). Some Senecas were already allied with the Ottawa leader Pontiac, and the English wanted to be sure that most of the Haudenosaunee would not also join Pontiac. The council of September 1763 demonstrates how the Haudenosaunee and a white diplomat, Sir William Johnson, used the Covenant Chain to reaffirm that the Kahnawake, Akwesasne, and Oka Mohawks of Canada as parts of the Confederacy, a reaffirmation of a 1760 "reunification" effort that was necessary because these Mohawks had been allied with the recently defeated French. The council also brought back into the Confederacy any Haudenosaunee people at Oswegatchie (now Ogdensburg, New York) who may also have fought on the side of the French. And lastly, the

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